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First Year Essay. Business studies.

Many organisations have decided to reorganise their traditional hierarchical structure into modern team structures. Select the key theories in the areas of motivation and stress and link them to the challenges organisations implementing this type of change might face.

The object of the study: Changing from traditional hierarchical structure to team structure; probably we will need to define both.

The Context of the study: Present day.

The Method of the Study: Making links between motivation and stress theories and the object of study. All of these will need to be mentioned along the way.

The hierarchical system can be truly called 'traditional'. It has existed for many years and a variety of its examples can be found in history – for example, in the

feudal system and in factories in times of the industrial revolution. Established in prehistoric times, (then very primitive, just between the tribesmen and their chief) it has survived to enter the twenty-first century. **This introduction is a bit more literary than it should be. It would be enough to define the hierarchical structure and then talk about the fact that organisations are changing it.**

The traditional hierarchical system resembles a pyramid. The hierarchy in modern organisations looks this way: this pyramid has the director at the top and then many layers of management (the closer to the bottom, the wider, meaning that each layer contains a greater number of people than the previous one). Keuning

and Opheij (1994) write that this system has been used in almost all organisations until the second half of the twentieth century. To reach such a detailed and complex structure, the system has developed over the years, more layers of subordination appearing in it, but the main principle remained the same. Weber (1970, cited in Fincham & Rhodes, 2005) clearly explains it:

The hierarchy, or division of power, involves the ranking of offices to provide clear lines of command. In bureaucracies the hierarchy also is typically very complex, its many levels providing a highly differentiated structure of authority.

(Weber, 1970, cited in Fincham & Rhodes, 2005: 447)

The first goal has been achieved – the student has described what a hierarchical structure looks like. Now the student needs to talk about the shift towards a team-based structure.

Weber claims that hierarchical systems of the twentieth century are very complex with multiple layers of subordination (**see Figure 2**). Keuning and Opheij (1994) see it as a serious issue. They argue that a large number of management layers slow down the main processes that determine the company's effective work, such as decision-making and its ability to adjust to changing external circumstances as well as respond quickly and effectively to the changes in the environment, such as developments in the market (West, 2004). Too tall a structure of an organisation,

according to Keuning and Opheij (1994), makes the orders to execute these processes travel a long way before they finally reach the person responsible for carrying them out.

The student briefly outlines some reasons why such a change is happening in the first place.

Therefore, in order to eliminate these problems and make the organisation more efficient in terms of saving time and money (the latter means cutting down on enormous expenses related to paying salaries to numerous managers (Keuning & Opheij, 1994)), in many organisations decisions are taken to move 'away from rigid hierarchical structures to more organic flexible forms' (West, 2004, p.8).

Keuning and Opheij (1994) emphasise the method called 'delaying', or reducing the number of hierarchical layers (**see Figure 1**). West (2004) offers another way – creating teams in organisations, but the latter method also includes making the organisational structure flatter, which means delaying. Making teams in large and tall organisations, Keuning and Opheij argue, is not possible, due to the narrow span of control.

Team-based structure has been described and defined.

Various researches proved that the methods were beneficial to some extent since they increased job satisfaction among some groups of employees, proved to be effective in the turbulent, complex and changing environment, increased the

speed of decision-making and quality of performance (Keuning & Opheij, 1994). However, despite seeming to be nothing but beneficial, modern team structure has numerous drawbacks, and organisations implementing this type of change might face significant difficulties.

Here the student says that there are challenges as well as benefits to team structure, and now will start listing them one by one. The student should start thinking about possible problems and linking them to motivation and stress theories in management. In other words, the subsequent paragraphs should all be linked to the essay question – particularly to the object and the context of the study.

The first issue comes from the concept of delayering. Reducing a number of management layers means many managers are going to lose their jobs. Front pages of the newspapers shout out loud: *'Middle management can expect some heavy blows'; 'And how it's the turn of the chiefs'* (Keuning & Opheij, 1994). Any changes in the work environment make employees feel uncertain about their future, and, in case of 'delayering', the problems of redundancy are obvious. This can cause serious stress. What is more, delayering is always accompanied by the increase in responsibility among the employees. This can be seen as a highly stressful factor, too, and is linked to one of the most common workplace stressors – over-stimulation. The results of a survey carried out by Smith, Johal, Wadsworth, Davey-Smith and Peters (2000, cited in Fincham and Rhodes, 2005)

show 'that 80 per cent of respondents felt they had experienced a high work pace and intensity in their work' (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005: 73).

As soon as the analysis is started, the student mentions two obvious problems – job insecurity and over-stimulation. He provides statistics and references to show that he did not make it up, that those problems really do exist. Moreover, the fact that he points out those issues also indicates that he has read about the team structure and its challenges; that he knows what he is talking about, and thinks about things from a business perspective.

Furthermore, flat organisational structure limits the employees' opportunities for promotion due to reduced number of subordination levels. Maslow's (1954 cited in Fincham and Rhodes, 2005) theory explains, why this is a problem for the organisation. Maslow argues that from the beginning all humans have the same set of needs. They are divided into two groups – deficiency needs and higher-order ones. The former includes basic needs – such as ones for food, warmth, shelter and safety – and so-called social needs (for satisfactory and supportive relationships with others). The latter are the needs for self-esteem (recognition and belief in oneself) and self-actualisation (developing one's full potential). At the workplace where there is no possibility to satisfy the higher-order needs, job dissatisfaction prevails and hence, employees' motivation and morale decrease.

The problem above is also linked to a workplace stressor called 'entrapment'. It occurs when employees start to think they are unable to change their job or move up the career ladder due to very few job opportunities available for either position shift or promotion. The situation became especially sensitive after a decade of delayering of organisations in the 1990s (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005).

The student has found another problem and linked it to a theory of motivation, which he also links to a theory of stress. This shows that not only can copy textbook theories into his essays but also critically engage with them and see how they can be interlinked.

Another considerable difficulty derives from one of the main features of a flat organisation: 'tasks or roles there are less important than results. This is expressed in rewards, material or immaterial' (Keuning & Opheij, 1994, p. 24). Here a clash is seen with the definition of a team. Baguley (2002) points out that a team consists of members, who 'take decisions together, work together cooperatively and are jointly responsible for the outcomes' (Baguley, 2002, p.12). From this definition it is seen that the feedback for good or poor performance should be given to the entire team, not its separate members. If separate individuals are rewarded, the feeling of inequity is caused among other team members.

The concept of inequity comes from Adams's equity theory (Adams, 1965, cited in Fincham & Rhodes, 2005). The theory claims that people's satisfaction with the job depends on the ratio between the input (the amount of work individuals put into their jobs) and the outcomes (rewards which follow their work). In a team all individuals are equally responsible for the outcomes, hence rewarding one member makes others dissatisfied – after all, they all did the same job.

Once again: the student has read two books and found two opposing ideas in them. He points out that the two authors say two different things about teams in organisations and links it to another theory. This

shows the student's ability to make logical connections and engage with a number of theories.

Moreover, two more possible issues stem from the definition of a team given above. The first one is related to decision-making. The members of a team take decisions together. Fincham and Rhodes (2005) see the very process of decision-making as stressful. They argue that 'in the process individuals may experience an acute form of uncertainty' (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005, p. 69). But this is not the core of a problem, since people, whose job is actually to make decisions, for example, managers, experience this kind of stress, at least slightly, all the time. The issue is that the individuals, who used to work under supervision, managers

taking the decisions for them, would find it really hard to shift roles, from a task executor to a decision-maker, and the stress they experience would be much more serious and harmful. Fincham and Rhodes (2005) also argue that stress can reduce the quality of person's decision-making significantly. From this statement the conclusion can be made that people who are capable of making decisions, but had been working under supervision for a long time, would experience the difficulties in 'shifting' to new order and the stress related to those difficulties would diminish their natural ability. **The student makes a conclusion in his own words, based on the arguments above taken from the writings of others.**

The second issue derives from the statement that all team members are jointly responsible for the outcomes, or the results of their work. Most people are used to working on their own and being accountable only for the work they do. Individual working has been emphasised over the years. The clearest example is given by West (2004) – the educational system. It gives most of the importance to tasks done on one's own. The majority of assignments are to be done by a single student rather than a group. West even speaks about the 'exclusion of team working' (West, 2004: 11). Hence, again, it would be hard for the people to shift from individual responsibility to that of the group. These two issues slightly touch the concept of entrapment. Although entrapment, as mentioned above, is related to the employees' conviction that they are unable to change their jobs, the

issues above speak about people's conviction that they are unable to change the *style* of the job they are doing, or, in other words, the way they work. So, a parallel is seen between these two cases.

The core of one more important problem may lie within the extent to which the managers understand what *a team structure or layering an organisation is*. They may see the innovation only as a way to improve the key processes of the company's work and to cut down on various expenses, such as salaries to too many managers. However, the company's top management unit may forget about one of crucial rules in creating an effective team. According to Guzzo (1996) and Cohen & Bailey (1997), both cited in West (2004: 21), this rule sounds thus:

'Individuals should feel they are important to the fate of the team'. This means that the managers, who would, in case of restructuring, become team leaders, should provide their team with regular, clear and accurate positive feedback, which promotes team effectiveness (West, 2004). Unfortunately, many managers possess an old-school view that they should apply only punishment for poor performance, but if the employees perform well, that is the norm and no action in response is necessary. The evidence of the significance of this problem is seen both in various operant conditioning theories and in Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory. Fincham and Rhodes (2005) argue that according to operant theorists, reward is always more efficient in shaping behaviour than punishment, since reward encourages the behaviour which is expected of the individuals, and

punishment just tells one what he or she should avoid doing. Herzberg's two-factor theory backs up the statement above. The theory itself claims that at the workplace there exist two sets of factors which influence motivation and job satisfaction. The first group of factors is called 'hygienes'. It comprises supervision, salary, work environment, company policies and relationship with the colleagues. The presence of 'hygienes' in the workplace does not lead to job satisfaction, but their absence decreases it, as well as reducing motivation. Hence, 'hygienes' just makes working conditions 'normal'. The second group is called 'motivators'. These are responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement, and intrinsic aspects of the job (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959, cited in Fincham & Rhodes, 2005). Their presence in the workplace significantly increases

the individuals' motivation and job satisfaction. Recognition is the key 'motivator' in group work since it means providing positive feedback for good performance. But, again, the feedback in this case should be provided to the entire team, not its individual members so as not to ruin the team spirit and not to sow a sense of inequity among team members.

One of the 'hygienes' also should be pointed out – the supervision. Although supervision is often associated with hierarchical structure, the team also must have a person in charge, a leader, or, as Baguley (2002) calls him, a 'facilitator'. It is necessary for a team to have a leader for a number of reasons. First of all, having a leader reduces role ambiguity, since he or she divides the task among

the team members. What is more, the leader can eliminate the sense of inequity inside the team if someone is feeling that his or her workload is heavier than that of the others.

However, Keuning and Opheij (1994) state that when a manager becomes a team leader, his scope of control increases noticeably. This enlarges responsibility and, eventually, can lead to a quite dangerous workplace stressor – over-stimulation.

All things considered, restructuring organisations does not only have advantages, but also a number of considerable drawbacks. Implementing radical changes in the organisations must go side by side with careful and accurate management. If the latter does not exist, the company may face serious difficulties related to

decrease in motivation and increase in stress among the employees. In addition, the flexible form must remain flexible – the principles of a team structure cannot be dismissed, a compromise must exist if problems occur.

In the conclusion, the student repeats the main ideas of the essay – that restructuring has both benefits and drawbacks, that the change may lead to reduced motivation and increased stress, and makes a recommendation: careful management.

But why are demotivation and workplace stress such major issues for organisations? The answer to this question is given in the result of a study on the economic impact of badly organised work environment on the organisations'

performance. 'In 2003, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), an agency of UK government, estimated that industry in the UK loses £ 370 million a year because of stress' (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005, p. 55). And, since stress and motivation are highly interdependent, as an increase in the former causes a decrease in the latter, companies should take these factors into account while implementing major changes in their organisational structure.

The only serious mistake that the student makes is bringing new information into the conclusion. It is not good to do so – the conclusion should merely recap what has been said.

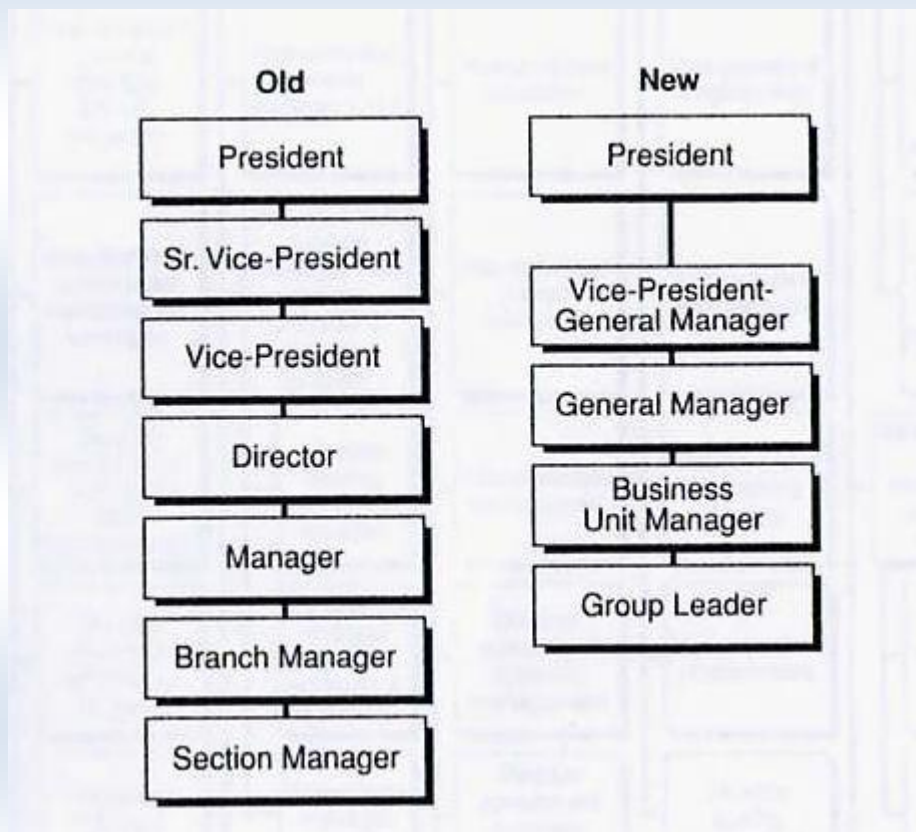


Figure 1: Douglas Aircraft Company's organisational structure: number of layers before and after delayering. Source: Keuning and Opheij, 1994.

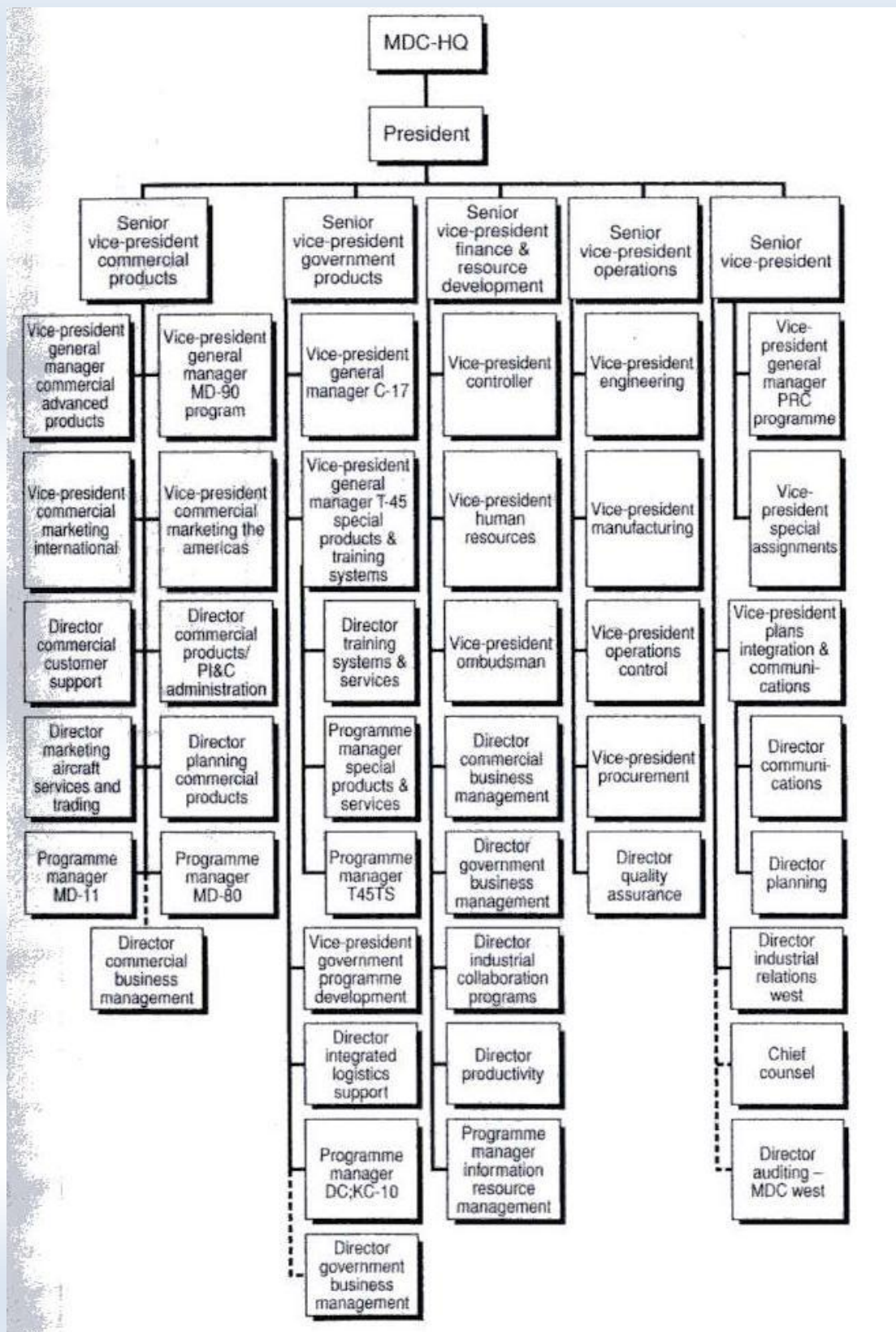


Figure 2: Master Organisation in Douglas Aircraft Company in 1988 (before delayering). Source: Keuning and Opheij (1994)

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